

Fast Car by Reality_Bytes

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Summary:

Based on Fast Car by Tracy Chapman. At seventeen, Joyce Calloway wants to get out of Hawkins and she thinks Lonnie Byers might be the key.

Fast Car

Author's Note:

Shoutout to Starmaammke for proofreading. You keep me going, doll!

Based on Fast Car by Tracy Chapman

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August 1964

Joyce Calloway lay in the bed of Lonnie Byers' truck. They stared up at the endless Hawkins sky, dreaming of the futures they could have together. They were seventeen years old and just about to start their senior year at Hawkins High. Well, Lonnie was. Joyce had dropped out a year ago in order to take care of her alcoholic father, because her mother had skipped town on both of them; but Joyce had bigger dreams than this place.

"Dammit, Lonnie, we've got to get out of here," Joyce said, rolling over on her side to face him.

Lonnie rolled over, gazing into Joyce's dark brown eyes, whose heat he could feel on his body when he looked away from her. "We will, babe," he promised, before grabbing the bottle of beer they were sharing and taking a swig, passing it to her. She finished off the drink and belched, giggling at herself.

"I have a plan, y'know," Joyce said, her eyes sparkling.

"Do ya now?"

"Mhm. We're gonna leave this shithole and make something of ourselves."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I've been saving up from my job at the store. We can go out to Indianapolis, get jobs, and see what life is really about."

“Sounds like a plan, sweetheart,” he said, and kissed her.

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Shortly after midnight, Joyce crept into the dumpy shack she had the great honor of calling home, praying that her father, Richie Calloway, was eighty proof by now and wouldn't hear her sneaking in past curfew, that he wouldn't smell Lonnie's cologne on her clothes.

“Where ya been, girlie?” He slurred.

“Out,” she replied shortly. Joyce just wanted to get to her room without a fight and go to sleep.

“Out being a fucking slut with that Byers boy?” He asked.

“He's a good guy and he takes care of me,” Joyce replied evenly.

“Like I don't care of you?” Her father asked, rising to his feet.

“I--I didn't say that, Daddy,” she replied, her hands coming up to her face.

“I've given you everything, Joycie, and how do you repay me? By shackin' up with that shithead. Probably gonna be knocked up by graduation,” her father ranted, looming over her as she shrank back.

“I won't be graduating, Daddy. I dropped out so I could take care of you!” She shot back.

Before she could say or do anything else, he slapped her across the face. Her cheeks began to burn, but she knew it was only partially from the assault. She balled her hands into fists, clenching the sleeves of the flannel she'd stolen from Lonnie months ago.

“I'm so sorry, Joycie, I didn't mean it,” her father whispered, reaching out to hug her, but she shrank away.

“You're drunk, go back to bed, Daddy,” she said. She went to the kitchen and got him a glass of water, leaving it on the table next to his recliner. On the same table was a bottle of aspirin, which was kept there for his hangovers.

"You're too good to me, Joycie," he said, settling back into his chair.

"Night, Daddy," she whispered, stealing off to her room, hoping he wouldn't bother her again for the night.

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May 1965

The night after Lonnie had graduated high school, he and Joyce were lying in the back of his truck again.

"Lonnie, we gotta get outta here or we never will. I don't wanna die in this crap ass town," Joyce said, looking at him with those serious brown eyes of hers, those eyes he couldn't resist.

"Alright, let's do it."

That was it. He drove her home in his truck so she could pack the few possessions she'd managed to keep her father from hocking for beer money.

As Joyce scurried out of the pathetic house, she gave one last glance over her shoulder at her father, who was in his chair, fast asleep. He was snoring with his mouth wide open. The sight gave her pause; she was all he had left. She questioned whether they loved each other, but without her care, she knew he wouldn't last.

"No, I have to do this," she whispered to herself.

Joyce squared her shoulders and marched out of the house, without so much as leaving a note. She knew if she had, it would be that much easier for him to call her back home, and she planned on never coming back. She climbed into the front seat of Lonnie's truck.

"Ready, babe?" He asked.

"As I'll ever be." She sighed.

"Hey," he said, grabbing her hand. She looked up at him. "You need this," he said.

She nodded. "You're right."

He started the engine and drove them towards their new life together. Years later, she would remember the glow of the city lights, calling to her like a lighthouse calls to ships. She'd remember the warmth of his arm around her shoulders.

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May 1966

They were married in a courthouse with Karen Pearce as a witness. Lonnie hadn't found a job, so his booze habits and her chain smoking and the rent were taken care of by what little Joyce earned working at a local grocery store - but being gone was better than staying in Hawkins, and every Friday, Lonnie took her out to a small Mexican restaurant for dinner and they'd talk about the week over margaritas and tacos.

One spring night, Joyce was at the kitchen table in their apartment, paying bills, trying to figure out how they'd make it through the month, when Lonnie stumbled in. "Where've you been?" She asked, trying to keep her tone casual.

"Out looking for jobs," he said, but when he leaned down to kiss Joyce's head, she could smell whiskey on his breath.

"Yeah? How'd it go?" She asked, deciding not to call him on it.

"Nothin,'" he replied, going into the fridge for a beer.

Joyce sighed and speared her fingers through her reddish brown hair. "I don't know how we're gonna do it this month," she said.

"Babe, stop worrying all the time." He sat across from her, nursing his beer.

"Somebody's gotta," she replied tersely.

He rose to his feet, looming over her. "Are you saying I don't take care of you?"

Her hands flew to her face reflexively. “N-no, I just--” she stammered.

“Because if you think I don't, you can just drag your ass back to your father's house and see how you do there,” Lonnie spat.

“You're right, I'm sorry,” she whispered.

“I'm sorry I snapped, babe,” he said, coming around the back of her chair and massaging her shoulders. He bent low to kiss her neck. “Maybe we could have a kid,” he whispered.

“Maybe. A big house, picket fence, a swing set in the backyard,” Joyce mused.

“Whatever you want, sweetheart,” he said, even though she knew deep down they were empty words.

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May 1980

Fourteen years passed. Joyce's father had passed away ten years before. She'd had him cremated and dumped his ashes in the river. After his debts had been settled, all that was left was the broken down house she'd grown up in. Her and Lonnie decided to sell the apartment and move back to Hawkins with their little boy, Jonathan. Shortly after the move, Joyce found she was pregnant with a second child.

Unlike her daydream, Lonnie was even worse at being a father than he was at being a husband. He was never home unless Joyce begged him to stay with Jonathan and Will while she went to work to support all of them, and even then, she worried for her sons' safety and well being. Both of her sons were old enough to understand that their Daddy wasn't such a good guy, and that he often made Mommy hurt in ways the boys couldn't help.

Lately, Lonnie was hardly ever home, which Joyce came to see as a blessing. If he was out, he wasn't hitting her or almost hitting the boys, or making a mess and expecting her to clean it up after him.

Lonnie stumbled into the house at three in the morning, drunk as a

skunk. Joyce was waiting up for him, sitting on the sofa, arms crossed. She rose to her feet. "Where the fuck were you?" She whispered venomously.

"I was out, why do you care?" He asked.

"You need to leave," she said, trying to make herself look taller and larger than she really was.

"This is my house," he replied, starting to raise his voice.

Joyce scoffed and threw her hands up. "Like hell it is! I work all fucking day, I take care of our children, and all you do is drink away my hard earned money. You haven't worked a day in years and you care more about your buddies than you do about your family," Joyce ranted.

"What's gotten into you?" Lonnie asked.

"The last ten years, I have worried over everything while you sat back and drank yourself sick. You wanna die alone like my father? Go right ahead, but don't do it in this house. You leave tonight or I'm calling the cops," Joyce said, shoving him back towards the door.

He laughed derisively. "You're gonna call the cops? You think that punk Jim Hopper's gonna save you?"

"Maybe. Lord knows you never did," Joyce retorted.

Lonnie slapped her in the face. That was the last straw for her. She summoned all the pain and anger over years of abuse from her father and then her various boyfriends, and now Lonnie. She let the emotions course through her veins, enlivening her muscles. She shoved him with all the strength she had in her tiny body.

"GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE RIGHT NOW!" She screamed, continuing to shove him and scream incoherent profanities at him until he was against his truck, not caring if the boys woke up.

"Alright, fine, I'll leave. But I'm not coming back, and you'll never get a cent from me ever again," Lonnie said, getting into his truck.

"FINE! JUST GET OUTTA HERE!" She bellowed, kicking the side of his car as he started the ignition and backed out of the driveway.

She went back inside. Although she heard his car roaring away down the road, she called the police department.

It rang several times, and a deep voice answered, like a lullaby. "Hawkins Police Department, Chief Hopper speaking."

She'd been expecting Flo, maybe Callahan. Not Hopper.

"Hop, it's me," she whispered shakily.

"Joyce?" He asked.

"Yeah." She sighed.

"Hey, what's going on?" He asked.

"Lonnie, h-he...I...", she stammered, not knowing where to begin.

"Did he hurt you?" Hop asked.

"He tried. I-I kind of kicked him out. I don't think he's coming back," Joyce said.

"Do you want me to come over?"

"If you're not busy."

"No, I'm coming. I'll be over soon. Lock your doors, okay?"

Joyce released a shaky breath. "Okay, Hop. See you in a bit," she whispered and hung up the phone before she could try to talk him out of coming.

Hopper was over faster than she would have reckoned. Joyce thought he might have pushed the speed limit, using his immunity as the town police chief. He knocked softly on the front door and she unlocked it and let him in. Before she could stop herself, she threw herself into his arms and he held her as she cried.

"Shhh, it's okay, JC, it's alright now," he whispered, rubbing her

back.

"I'm not JC anymore," she protested weakly.

"You'll always be JC to me," he said, pulling back to look into her eyes.

When he calmed her down, they sat on the porch outside, sharing a beer and a pack of cigarettes. She exhaled smoke into the night air. "Jesus, Hop, what happened to us?" She asked.

"Beats the hell outta me," he replied, sipping his beer.

"I used to have all these dreams and plans, and now I have nothing." She sighed.

"Hey, that's not true, you have your little boys," Hop pointed out.

"Yeah, you're right," she whispered.

"Hey, you wanna go somewhere, just for old time's sake?" He asked.

She put a hand on his knee. "No, that's what got me into this mess in the first place," she said.